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**IN FOCUS**

*This issue opens with a write-up on this year's Sangeetha Kalanidhi Shri Palghat Raghu. This is followed by an article on the contribution of Maharaja Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar, the royal composer of Karnataka, to Carnatic music. The next article is the concluding part of the treatise on the variations in raga names in Tyagaraja Kritis found in the Telugu Publications before 1930. Next is a tete to tete with the indomitable Leela Samson followed by a review of Kalakshetra's magnificent offerings. Among others, there is an analytical article on Music Education : A Review and Reforms, an interpretation on the glory that is veena, being the extension of the performer's self, an interesting article on new trends in Bharatanatyam on roller-skates, one on the development of Music Therapy in India, and the usual features of Interviews, Book Review, Budding Talent and a report on Happenings at the Sangeetha Vidyalaya.*



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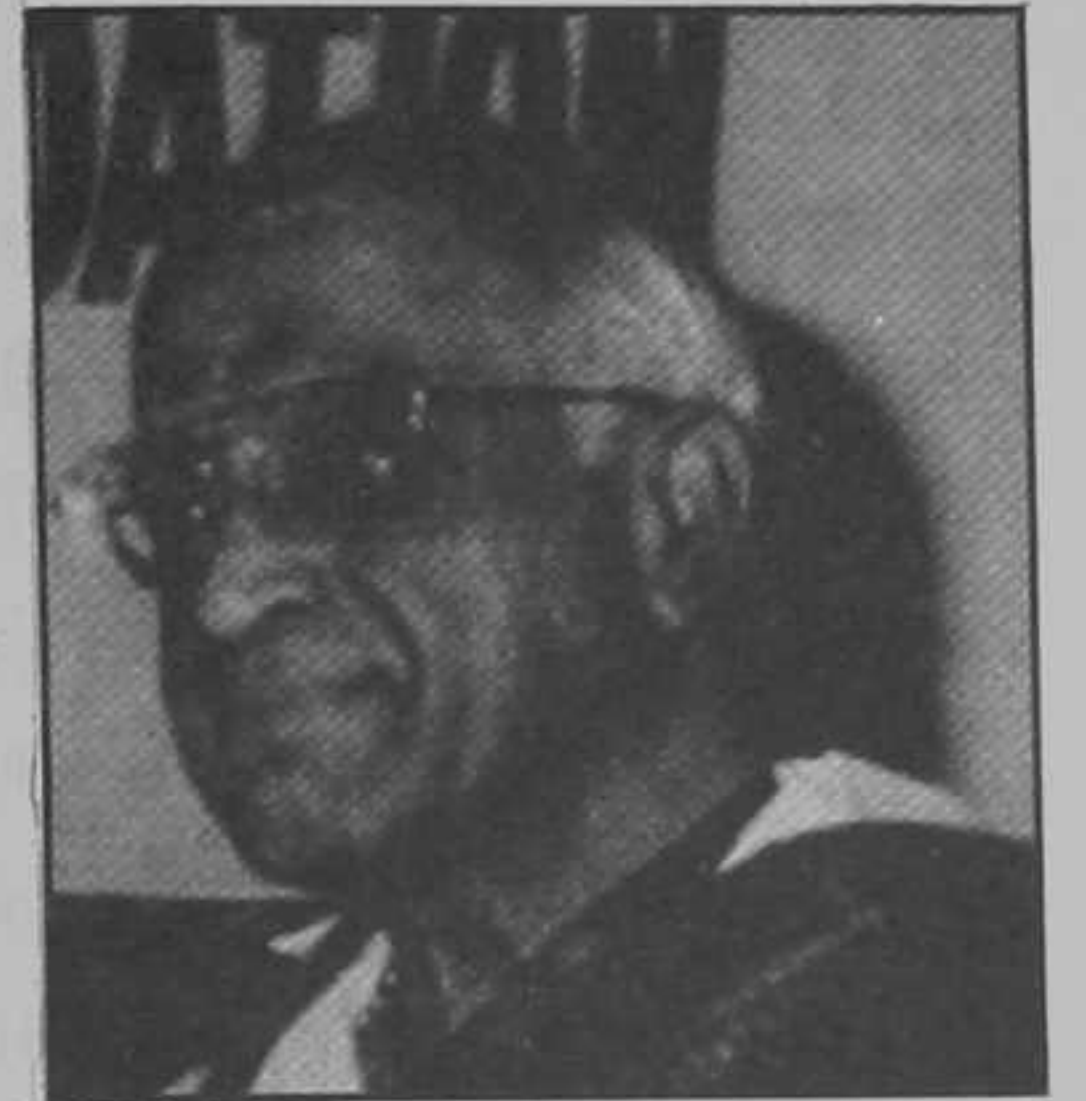
**SANGEETHA KALANIDHI SHRI PALGHAT RAGHU**

by V. Subrahmanyam

Every year by the month of August/September, the musical fraternity and the rasikas of Carnatic music would be expectantly awaiting the announcement of the Sangeetha Kalanidhi of the year by the Music Academy, Chennai. The Madras Music Academy is the most prestigious institution of music that has been functioning for the last eight decades with great international acclaim. The award "Sangeetha Kalanidhi" is considered the most coveted award for a Carnatic musician. This year the Academy advanced the process and the announcement was made in May itself, the unanimous choice being, mrudangam maestro, Palghat R. Raghu. This choice was welcomed by almost every musician even though it was felt that the conferment on Sri Raghu is belated.

A senior disciple of mrudangam wizard and genius, Palghat Mani Iyer, Raghu ranked next to him for almost six and half decades. Born in January 1928 in Rangoon - Burma, now Myanmar, Raghu showed great interest and talent in percussion. His maternal grandfather, who was knowledgeable in music, noticed this as Raghu drummed on anything he could lay his hands on even when he was just three or four. Tinniam Venkatarama Iyer, a leading mrudanga vidwan of that time, used to

frequently visit Rangoon in those days and impressed by Raghu's talent, presented him with a small mrudangam and initiated him into lessons in mrudangam playing. Venkatarama Iyer had also expressed to Raghu's grandfather that the boy should be brought over to him for regular lessons, whenever they moved over to Madras. On account of the intensity of World War II, Raghu's family had to evacuate Burma and move over to Madras in 1940 and as contemplated Raghu was put under Tinniam Venkatarama Iyer.



The 78 RPM records of the 1930s of the stalwarts of Carnatic music became available at Rangoon immediately after their release at Madras, and Raghu had easy access to them. Palghat Mani Iyer's mrudangam accompaniment in those records instantly created a passion and craving in Raghu's young mind that he should certainly become this mrudangam wizard's disciple. Coincidentally enough, Raghu, with his grandfather, had to move out of Madras to Palghat by 1942 as the shadows of the intensified World

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War II loomed large over Madras by then. It was almost the first task of Raghu's grandfather to take his grandson to Palghat Mani Iyer to make him his disciple. After persistent persuasive requests, Mani Iyer made Raghu play mrudangam before him to assess the boy's potential in the art. Mani Iyer heard him and said that there was not much to be taught to Raghu. The master taught him some fingering techniques and made him play for concert practices, which were frequently held at Mani Iyer's residence by aspiring young musicians, one of them being Palghat K.V. Narayanaswami.

Raghu soon climbed to the top level as a mrudangam artiste, ranking next to the front liners of the time - Palghat Mani Iyer, Palani Subramania Pillai and others. Raghu had the opportunity and blessing to accompany great stalwarts even when he was still in school. The first concert in Madras on his return to India in 1940, where he featured as a mrudangam accompanist, was that of the great composer-musician of the last century, Papanasam Sivan. He teamed up with Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Alathur Brothers, and G.N. Balasubramaniam soon after.

Raghu's quick ascent to high levels on the concert platform bears testimony to his highly classical style of playing the mrudangam. No doubt his playing technique has been that of his mentor

Palghat Mani Iyer's. Raghu has his own stamp of individuality on it. The rasikas can easily perceive the classical dignity in his playing, which would stand out clearly. His rhythmic patterns spring out imaginatively with absolute accuracy.

Raghu has travelled the world over. He was invited in 1960 by the internationally renowned violin maestro, Yehudi Menuhin, to participate in the Bath Festival in UK and again in the Edinburgh Festival in 1963, where his concerts were widely acclaimed. He visited the US for the first time in 1965 when he was invited by the Wesleyan University as a visiting professor. At that time he gave several concerts teaming up with Pandit Ravi Shankar, Sitar; and Alla Rakha, Tabla. This combination of mrudangam and tabla accompaniment for the Sitar became very popular, drawing packed houses for the concerts. This continued with other Hindustani musicians as well, such as Pandit Kishen Maharaj Ji, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan etc. Later, the American Society for Eastern Arts invited Raghu for teaching in Berkeley, California and to play in concerts in several centres in Europe - Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, etc. In 1988, Raghu visited Australia to participate in the Adelaide Music Festival, which was followed by percussion concerts (tala vadya cutcheries) in other cities of Australia and Singapore.

In Raghu's family, general education also had high priority and hence, parallel to pursuing mrudangam playing, he graduated in Mathematics. When he entered the concert platform, general education among professional musicians was almost absent, the exception being G.N.B, who was B.A (Hons.), English Literature. As it was prestigious then to be a graduate among musicians, Raghu used to be known as Palghat Raghu, B.A., Mrudangam, in the notices of all his concerts.

Raghu has a host of sishyas, who have achieved concert proficiency. He has trained his own son, Ram Kumar on mrudangam. His grand children are also highly proficient in music - Abhishek Raghuram in vocal music and kanjira

and Anand in mrudangam.

It is no surprise that so many accolades, honours, and titles have been conferred on Palghat Raghu. In the year 1978, on behalf of Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Madras, the great maestro of mrudangam, Palghat Mani Iyer conferred on his own disciple, the title "Sangeetha Choodamani". Other awards, which followed are the Fellowship of Sangeetha Nataka Academy, Kerala, in 1980, Palghat Mani Iyer Memorial Award (for the first time in 1983), President's Award of the Central Sangeet Natak Academy, New Delhi, in 1983, Padma Sri in 1984, etc. And now a jewel on his crown, "Sangeetha Kalanidhi" by the Music Academy, Chennai, conferred on him at the Sadas on the 1st of January, 2008. □

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## CONTRIBUTION OF MAHARAJA SRI JAYACHAMARAJENDRA WODEYAR TO CARNATIC MUSIC

by Dr. Sukanya Prabhakar

Between the 15th and 18th century, art and culture prospered in Mysore with great encouragement from the Wodeyar dynasty. Not only were they great patrons of art but also were themselves proficient in various fields. Under their patronage, Mysore produced great stalwarts in the classical art forms. The rulers also took up the task of educating their subjects in these art forms so that there was an appreciative audience for the artistes. The rulers themselves learnt the classical arts, different languages and literature.

Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar was born in 1919 at the end of the 1st world war in which the allies were victorious. To commemorate this victory, His Highness Sri Chamaraja Wodeyar was named after his grandfather with the prefix 'jaya' which means victory. He got his B.A. from Mysore University winning five gold medals. After L.L.D from Benaras University he got his D.Lit. from Annamalai University. He learnt the piano and appeared for the exam held by Trinity College of London. After being called Licentiate from Guild Hall School of Music, London, he went on to become Honorary Fellow of Trinity College of music, London. He also obtained a D.Lit. from Queensland University.

• Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar learnt

Sanskrit, as also the Vedas and Upanishads. After imbibing a lot of music at home through his formative years, he had the privilege to learn music from the great musicians of that time-Sri Vasudevachar and Sri Venkatagiriappa. His great love for Sanskrit prompted him to compose all his 94 kritis in Sanskrit. They are challenging for a singer as they are in rare ragas set to difficult talas. He composed only kritis as there is more freedom for the composer while doing so than when one composes varnas or swarajatis. The kritis also contain philosophy. Excerpts from *Lalitha Sahasranamam*, *Lalitha Trishati*, and *Durgasaptashati* are woven into them very intelligently. To illustrate this:

- a) *varadaharaakaasha madhyavartini* (in the kriti Kaamakshim in raga Vasanta set to roopaka tala) is an excerpt from Chaandogya Upanishad.
- b) *naaham jeevoham soham bhaava* (in the kriti Gam ganapate in raga nagaswarawali) depicts *aham bramhaasmi*-the theory of advaita philosophy.
- c) *swaatmanandarata* (in the kriti Swaminatha in charukesi) contains the theory *sarvam shivamayam*.



d) *bhoomiyadi tatvaloya druta* (from the kriti Paripaahimaam in raga vakulabharanam) describes Ganesha as the embodiment of the panchabhootas.

He has used apt words in Sanskrit so that they blend into music easily without sounding heavy. Sri Jayachamarajendra has experimented with ragas, talas and structure to make his kritis unique. In Mahaganapathim in raga amritavahini, the pallavi is repeated after every charana.

He has not only composed in popular ragas like Todi or Shankarabharanam but also in rare ragas like Haatakambari, Suryakantam etc. It is to be noted that he has never repeated a raga in all his ninety-four compositions. Among the pratimadhyama ragas, in addition to the well-known kalyani and kamavardhini) he has employed rishabhapriya, shadvidhamaargini, vishwambhari etc. He has used many ragas found only in books, as there have been no compositions in them, effectively. Shuddhasaalavi, Shivakamboji, Doorvanki are some of them. He also has created new ragas like Jayasamvardhana, Suranandini and Bhoopala Panchama.

Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar has also used, besides the common talas, several difficult talas like chaturasra dhruva, misra tripata, sankeerna tripata, khanda jhampa, khanda roopaka and chaturasra ata tala. He has not used any of the chaapu talas-like khanda chapu or misra chapu. The

longest tala, chaturasra dhruva, has been used by him in *Ksheera sagara sayana* in vilamba kala consisting of twenty eight beats in each avartana. In the kriti *Haatakeswaran* in raga haatakambari the song begins in chaturasra nadai and in the charana it changes to tisra nadai. In another kriti in raga Vasanta Bhairavi the madhyama kala sahitya in the last half of the anupallavi shifts from chaturasra to tisra nadai.

After looking at the various complexities with regard to the tala, raga or structure that Sri Jayachamarajendra has employed in his kritis, we can conclude that singing them is a real challenge and calls for a lot of scholarship and application on the part of the singer. Hence his kritis are not very popular as a lot of time and effort has to be put into mastering them. One hopes that serious musicians take up this challenging task and popularise his compositions so that the music world is made aware of the rich legacy Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar has left for us.

*The Author Dr. Sukanya Prabhakar is a senior musician of Karnataka. After her post-graduation in music, she obtained Vidwat with distinction. She got her Ph.D. from Mysore University for her research on the contribution of Sri Jayachamarajendra Wodeyar to Carnatic music. She was awarded the Senior Fellowship from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for research on Rare Instruments In The Mysore Palace. She has to her credit several awards and titles from leading institutions of the country.*

## VARIATIONS IN RAGA NAMES IN TYAGARAJA KRITIS FOUND IN THE TELUGU PUBLICATIONS BEFORE 1930.

by **Radha Sarangapani** Lecturer, Potti Sriramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad.  
(contd. from previous issue of Shanmukha, July-September, 2007)

**Nemora bettite** Rupavati (present name)  
Todi (earlier name)

Sri Tyagaraja Swami Charitram (1916) Sangita Pradayini (1916)	Rupavati
--	----------

**Patti Viduvaradu** Manjari (present name)  
Kharaharapriya (earlier name)

Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangraham (1859) Tyagaraja Kirtanalulu (1881) Sangita Kalanidhi (1912) Gayana Gayani Janaparijatam (1898) Prathamabhyasa Pustakamu (1905) Ganendu Sekharam (1912) Sri Tyagaraja Swami Charitram (1916) Sri Tyagaraja Hridayam (1922) Sangitamrta Kirtanalulu (1929)	Kharaharapriya  Manjari  Manjari
--	--

**Paraloka Bhaya** Mandari (present name)  
Bhramara Mandari (earlier name)

Sangita Kalanidi (1912) Sri Tyagaraja Swami Charitram (1916) Sangita Sudhambudhi (1922) Sangitamrta Kirtanalulu (1929)	Mandari  Bhramara Mandari
---	---------------------------------

The list of the songs also included.

**Paraloka Sadhaname** Purvikalyani (present name)  
Yamuna (earlier name)

**Pari Yachakama** Vanaspati (present name)  
Senapati (earlier name)

**Palukavemi** Purnachandrika (present name)  
Chandrakanta (earlier name)



<b>Phanipati Sayi</b>	Jhankaradhvani ( <i>present name</i> ) Purvikalyani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Brochevarevare</b>	Sriranjani ( <i>present name</i> ) Yamunakalyani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Manavini vinuma</b>	Jayanarayani ( <i>present name</i> ) Kharaharapriya ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Mariyada</b>	Bhairavam ( <i>present name</i> ) Bhairavi ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Marubalka</b>	Sriranjani ( <i>present name</i> ) Abheri ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Muddumomu</b>	Suryakantam ( <i>present name</i> ) Manohari ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Munupe teliyaka</b>	Bangala ( <i>present name</i> ) Srutiranjani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Raghunandana</b>	Suddha desi ( <i>present name</i> ) Jaganmohini ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Raghuvara</b>	Pantuvarali ( <i>present name</i> ) Subhapantuvarali ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Ragusudharasa</b>	Andolika ( <i>present name</i> ) Mayuradhvani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Rara Sita Ramani</b>	Hindola Vasanta ( <i>present name</i> ) Andoli ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Lavanyarama</b>	Rudrapriya ( <i>present name</i> ) Purna Sadja ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Varanarada</b>	Vijayasri ( <i>present name</i> ) Varali ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Vinanasakoni</b>	Pratapa Varali ( <i>present name</i> ) Suddha Vasanta ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Vinave O Manasa</b>	Vivardhani ( <i>present name</i> ) Andoli ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Santamuleka</b>	Sama ( <i>present name</i> ) Anandabhairavi ( <i>earlier name</i> )

<b>Sripate</b>	Nagasvaravali ( <i>present name</i> ) Kalyani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sandehamu</b>	Ramapriya ( <i>present name</i> ) Yamuna Kalyani ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sarvabhoma</b>	Ragapanjaram ( <i>present name</i> ) Kalanidhi & Apurupam ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sitamma Mayamma</b>	Vasanta ( <i>present name</i> ) Lalita ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sitapate</b>	Khamas ( <i>present name</i> ) Devamanohari ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sogasuga</b>	Sriranjani ( <i>present name</i> ) Sulini ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sogasujuda</b>	Kannadagoula ( <i>present name</i> ) Isamanohari ( <i>earlier name</i> )
<b>Sujanajivana</b>	Khamas ( <i>present name</i> ) Natakuranji ( <i>earlier name</i> )

From the above mentioned instances it is clear that for these kritis the raga names have changed. Some of the raga names mentioned in Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangraham (1859) have been changed in the later publications. Moreover some of the ragas given in Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangraham are not in vogue today. The ragas which have been mentioned in Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangraham might have been correct in view of the fact that the author of the publication was in all likelihood a contemporary of Sri Tyagaraja.

The main features found in the above mentioned examples are:

- 1) Some of the kritis have been given three raga names in different publications.  
1) Sarvabhoma 2. Evaraninirnayinchirira.
- 2) Some of the kritis mentioned in the publications are being sung in different ragas now. a) Phanipati Sayi b) Paraloka Sadhaname c) Kaligiyunte etc.
- 3) The raga names used in the publications which are not in vogue today. a) Yamuna b) Simharavam c) chandrakanta d) Apurupam e) Kalinga f) Nadachintamani g) Rupavati h) Kantamani i) Rudrapriya
- 4) Some of the raga names have been changed and have become janaka or janya ragas to their nearest mela ragas.



- a) **Dandamu** Purna Chandrika (29th mela)  
Balahamsa (28th mela)
- b) **Sarvabhoma** Ragapanjaram (29th mela)  
Kalanidhi (22nd mela)
- c) **Kaligiyunte** Kiravani (21st mela)  
Varunapriya (24th mela)
- d) **Sitamma mayamma** Vasanta (17th mela)  
Lalita (15th mela)
- e) **Teliyaleru** Todi (8th mela)  
Dhenuka (9th mela) etc.,

5. Some of the ragas have been changed to their own parent mela raga and janya raga also

- a) **Nenarunchi** Malavi (Harikambhoji)  
b) **Manavini** Jayanarayani (kharaharapriya)  
c) **Evarani** Devamrtavarshini (Kharaharapriya)

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#### INTERVIEW

### FACE TO FACE WITH LEELA SAMSON

by Jyothi Mohan

While watching Dasaru Kanda Krishna on 23rd Nov.2007, the 1st day of the 3-day festival of Dance dramas presented by Kalakshetra Foundation under the aegis of Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha, I was struck by the refreshing choreography and the dynamic, professional standard of presentation by the dancers. The scene was reminiscent of the late '60s and early '70s when I had watched Rukmini Kalyanam, Sita Swayamwaram and other dance dramas in Bangalore. Subsequently, the ones I watched in the '90s were nothing compared to those magnificent, memorable ones and one felt sad at the decline in standards. But this festival brought back old memories and I decided to ask Leela Samson about the revival of Kalakshetra's glory and magnificence.

I was a bit late for the appointment, thanks to a massive traffic snarl. When I reached the auditorium, she was checking out the nattuvanar's mike level. When I introduced myself, she quickly accompanied me backstage and without wasting a moment, started answering my questions. Soft-spoken (I had to really strain my ears to catch her words!), no airs, very down to earth, sums up this great dancer. Kalakshetra gave her everything and today she is giving everything to make Kalakshetra what it once was.

Complimenting her for the lovely choreography and the excellent performance by all the dancers I asked her how she had managed to turn it around in

such a short period. She replied that she and all the teachers worked at every level with the dancers to



instil in them confidence and give them the required exposure to enable them take their rightful place on the performing platform. She strongly feels that senior artistes, have had their share of limelight and should concentrate on helping the younger artistes and encourage them to ascend the stage and prove their worth. She has through personal example ensured that talented youngsters get to play major roles. Though she still performs, she has decided not to participate when there are talented students available to do the lead roles. She feels that this will ensure a bright future for Kalakshetra by the old guard passing the baton to the new. She has thus won their loyalty, love and respect as was evident when I saw the students interact with her. The teachers have done a wonderful job under the new leadership; as one could find no fault with any dancer-all danced with precision, perfect anga shuddham and mature abhinaya.

Do you find the same enthusiasm as before, for admission to this very prestigious institution in the face of competition from western dance schools that are mushrooming everywhere, I asked her. She replied that Kalakshetra attracted



only those very serious students of dance who applied themselves very sincerely to the rigorous discipline for which it is known.

I had seen some boys dance beautifully the previous day. Since most parents expect their sons to take up finance, engineering, medicine etc. I asked her how there were so many boys at Kalakshetra. She called out to two young boys who were walking past, introduced them as first year students and put my question to them. Both replied without any hesitation, that they had heard of Kalakshetra, seen the dance dramas and decided that dance was what they wanted to do and therefore applied for admission at Kalakshetra. They also told me that their families fully supported their decision. Leela Samson said that there were cases when boys defied their families to learn dance because they were committed to the art form. Universities give a degree at the end of 4 years. She felt, that giving a degree at the end of the course, instead of the diploma that is now offered, would make it more acceptable to people. Towards this end they have revamped the syllabus, included several new aspects in the training programme so that their curriculum stands a head above what other university departments have to offer. She hopes their request for awarding a degree will be considered.

I asked her about the plans she had during her tenure. She replied that she felt very strongly about having a full-fledged research centre, a well-stocked library with documentation of all the Kalakshetra productions. She also hopes to have a large-scale museum to ensure that the future generations are made aware about the history and unparalleled excellence of

Kalakshetra.

When I asked her whether they enjoyed better patronage from Sabhas and other organisations with regard to performing opportunities, she was amused. On the contrary, people hesitate to invite us she said! With the growing menace of dancers paying for an opportunity, only the mediocre or very wealthy get to perform, she lamented. To offset this, at Kalakshetra, they give talented dancers, their own as well as from outside, an opportunity to perform, she said.

She told me that Rukmini Devi strongly felt that all dancers should know music. She stipulated that if anyone fared poorly in music there was no way she would get a high grade in dance. Every student also learnt Sanskrit, Tamil or Telugu. Yoga is also taught for physical and mental well-being. Thus every one who graduates from Kalakshetra is fully equipped to become a qualified teacher who can spread the rich legacy of her Alma Mater to the next generation.

When I asked her what the future spelt for Kalakshetra, she said she was putting a system into place, so that long after her, there would always be a dedicated team to do their best to keep alive, the torch lit by Rukmini Devi, for the generations to come.

At the end of the last dance drama when I went to see Leela Samson again, I found her folding the curtains, putting away boards that were part of the backdrop etc. When a great dancer like her identifies herself so totally with her institution, it leaves you in no doubt that the institution is in safe, good hands and can only march forward with more confident strides. □

## DANCE REVIEW

### KALAKSHETRA PERFORMS AT SHANMUKHANANDA

by Jyothi Mohan

Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai presented an audio-visual feast with 3 dance-dramas to the delight of dance and music lovers of Mumbai under the aegis of Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha on 23rd, 24th & 25th Nov. 2007.

Dasaru Kanda Krishna choreographed by

—ringara, vatsalya, sakhya or madhura bhakti.

Beginning with *E pariya sobagu*, followed by *Gopiya bhagyavidu* in which the dancers described the beautiful form of Krishna through interesting group choreography where the mood was one of admiration for the very lovable Krishna.



Leela Samson was presented on the first evening. It described Krishna in his myriad forms through the outpourings of the Haridasas.. Popular devaranamas interspersed with appropriate *ugabhogas* brought before us bhakti in various moods

In contrast, was the next number, *Yeshtu dushtane ninna maga*, in which the gopis went complaining to mother Yashoda about her errant son. Ganga as the mother stole the show with vatsalya oozing out of every pore. Her surprise and dismay at all



the accusations being hurled at her innocent little son were very convincingly brought out in all subtlety through eloquent eyes. Her reply to their complaints, with the ever-popular *Jagadodharana*, was beautifully essayed by her with dignity and pride.

After that evocative song came a *ugabhoga* in which an impressive, dramatic kalinga mardana was presented by the very energetic Krishna portrayed by Shamjith Kiran.

*Aadidano Ranga* that followed was very vibrant with all the boys dancing with great vigour. The delightful raas in *Yaadavaraaya* thrilled the audience-aesthetic group movements, perfect synchronisation in the leaps and pirouettes were breathtaking. The gopis frolicking while bathing in the river gave way to anger when they discovered to their dismay that Krishna had taken away their clothes in the *ugabhoga* that followed. *Sahiye idu sahiye* that followed had the gopis asking Yashoda, in anger, whether what she was teaching her young son was right, He asked us to bring both our hands together above our head before he gave us back our clothes, they cried.

*Jaganmohanane Krishna* described the greatness of Krishna through the Vamana avatara, Gajendra moksha, Mandaragiri episodes well presented by the boys.

The gopis' desolation when Krishna goes off to Mathura was conveyed with great sensitivity by the young girls in *Yaadavaraaya*. This gave way to a joyous

Tillana when news came in that Krishna was returning to them after his victory over Kamsa.

The beautiful synchronisation in group movements, refreshing choreography marked by simple but arresting patterns created with adroit use of stage space and subtle abhinaya left a deep impression at the end of the first evening.

On the second evening *Andal Charitram* was presented with the rich music score by Papanasam Sivan. It is said that Rukmini Devi was deeply inspired by the poetry and philosophy and was very keen on choreographing it. The costumes and the props used took us back to the 9th century.

Sreejith Krishna handled the first scene in which Periyazhwar discovers the little baby under the tulsi plant in his garden with great sensitivity. His excitement, anxiety and great love for the baby are etched in our minds! All the dancers also beautifully executed the following scene in which all the young maidens admired Kodai. The sequence in which Andal and her friends danced was lively and colourful. Indu Menon who played Andal was a delight to watch. Her young fresh face and eloquent eyes suited the role beautifully. The deep anguish of Periyazhwar on discovering Kodai's hair in the garland meant for the Lord was very touchingly portrayed by Sreejith. Andal dressing up, imagining her Lord's presence, adorning herself with the garland meant for Him was charmingly brought alive by Indu. The scene wherein, Periyazhwar discovers Andal wearing the garland meant for the diety and rebukes her, Andal begging for forgiveness and

Periyazhwar torn between the love for his daughter and his duty was very poignant. The final scene, in which Andal dressed in all her finery enters the sanctum of the temple for her union with her Lord, brought to an end the wonderfully choreographed Andal Charitram. Beautiful music, rendered soulfully in a bhava-laden voice by Hariprasad added to the subtle and sensitive presentation by the dancers.

The third day was indeed a grand finale with a spectacular presentation of the *Maha Pattabhishekam*. Choreographed by Rukmini Devi in her inimitable style, it brought forth vividly, the strong story line beginning with Vibhishana's defection and culminating in Rama's coronation.

After an invocation sung in Ghana panchakam extolling Ganesha, Anjaneya and Valmiki the curtain opened to a dance in the court of Ravana. The dramatic entry of Ravana, his announcement of fighting Rama as he did not want to give up Sita and Vibhishana's remonstrations about the folly of such an action set the tone for the drama to unfold. When Vibhishana's pleas fell on deaf ears and Ravana began questioning his loyalty, a crestfallen Vibhishana left the court and decided to seek refuge under Rama.

Vibhishana's meeting with Hanuman, Sugriva and Jambavan was laced with humour. Sugriva eyeing him with suspicion, Hanuman believing him, was well brought out. Rama offering his protection, assuring him that he would be crowned King of Lanka after defeating Ravana was lucidly portrayed.

The lilting kadanakuthuhalam for the vigorous setu bandhana scene was very apt. The high leaps by Hanuman, Sugriva and the monkey army delighted the old and young alike as did the comic interlude when they fell off the stage while moving the heavy rocks and bounced back onto the stage with ease.

The war against Ravana employed some Kathakali movements as well as instruments to enhance the dramatic element. Lakshmana deflecting the weapon aimed at Vibhishana but falling to the one directed at him was also well done. When Ravana lost his strength in the face to face battle with Rama he was asked to come back to fight after recouping his strength by Rama. This was very beautifully done and audience was left in no doubt about Rama's nobility and magnanimity.

The pathos when Rama sees Lakshmana's lifeless form was palpable. The singer's plaintive rendering of Shivaranjani matched by the deep anguish expressed by Rama left not a dry eye in the packed auditorium. At that moment one felt that this dance drama had to be seen twice-once to soak in the music and once to concentrate on the action on the stage! The bringing of the sanjeevani, revival of Lakshmana was done so effectively that everybody rejoiced with Rama on seeing Lakshmana regain consciousness.

Narration of the war by the apsaras was a beautiful concept that did away with repetitive battle scenes and all the violence of war. The apsaras did justice to their roles.



Agastya taught Rama the Aditya Hridaya mantra that enabled him to slay Ravana. When Vibhishana lamented over his dead brother's body, Haridas' rendering of saramathi generated a lot of sympathy for Ravana. Mandodari's grief was also very moving.

Sita arrives, overcome with excitement as well as emotion by Rama's presence. Her anguish at being rejected by Rama who doubts her chastity were sensitively portrayed. Her dignified command to Lakshmana to build a fire for her agni pareeksha, the dramatic trial by fire was well enacted. All felt Rama's joy at her emerging unscathed from the fire.

Sreejith Krishna as Rama and Ganga as Sita impressed. Ganga's expressive eyes and quiet dignity did full justice to her role. Sreejith brought out all the majesty and humility of Rama very convincingly.

The preparations for the coronation, Bharata worshipping the padukas of Rama and arrival of Rama in Ayodhya were neat. Rama stepping symbolically into the padukas to indicate he was taking back the kingdom from Bharata who had placed them on the throne in his absence was done with feeling. Rama giving Sita a beautiful necklace to give to one whose valour and loyalty had impressed her followed sage Vasishta performing the Maha Pattabhishekam. When Sita chose to give it to Hanuman, all in the audience felt his joy! A joyous Shanmukhapriya thillana brought the curtain down on this truly magnificent presentation of *Maha Pattabhishekam*.

The authentic costumes and accessories showed us how much of painstaking effort and research Rukmini Devi had put in, to create scenes reminiscent of those days. The music score by S. Rajaraman contributed in equal measure to the success of the production. The effortless ease and bhava-soaked mellifluous rendering by Haridas impressed. Crisp nattuvangam by Jyotsna Menon, Anil Kumar's deft strokes on the mridangam, evocative strains of the violin by Srinivas and the haunting melody on the flute by talented Sashidharan embellished the dance.

All the dancers on all 3 days were excellent in their roles. Perfect aramandi and anga shuddham, anga lakshanam, graceful yet taut movements, covering the stage with effortless ease and abhinaya shuddham were a delight to see.

The dance dramas we see today have more to do with props, lighting and loud music with louder costumes, so it was lovely to go back a few decades and relive the era of gracious presentation marked by subtlety and finesse. All credit to Leela Samson for restoring the glory of Kalakshetra, so that future generations have an ideal to draw inspiration from and strive to match the high standards set by Rukmini Devi.

One hopes Kalakshetra will come here year after year with some more of their magnificent offerings.

□

## THE GLORY THAT IS VEENA

By Karaikudi S. Subramanian, Ph.D

The name 'Veena' (as a generic name) symbolises the 'tradition; that is India, the glory that is India, the grandeur our nation conjures in the minds of the world's intellectuals. Although the Veena has a glorious past it is yet to capture the imagination of the present-day rasikas. It is strange but true that there are more Veena players in South India (and more abroad) than many other instruments. Every parent will be proud of her/his marriageable daughter for she 'knows' to play on the Veena. But the matter of interest ends there. After marriage the instrument is sure to end up in her household's pooja room to be dusted up only on the day of Saraswathi Pooja! Why has this come to pass? There are many reasons but primarily it is due to the demands the instrument makes on the player in terms of Sadhana and following which, there is not adequate 'money reward'. The 'fretted simplicity' of the Veena is very attractive to a beginner in Carnatic music; later, it becomes more demanding and complete so very few dare to attempt it. The natural acoustic sound of Veena lures only a select few. The Veena performance demands sensitive listening. To accompany this instrument also requires much sensitivity.

It seems, in this 'noise polluted' environs, the listeners are losing the sensitivity of the ear drums, to respond to subtle sounds such as that of the Veena. That is why almost every Veena player uses 'contact mike' now-a-days, to be able to reach out to the people. If this is inevitable in the modern context for the performers' predilections, the sabhas or well wishers of good classical music should compensate through creating opportunities for the meditative sounds of the Veena to be heard frequently in smaller spaces with no accompaniment! But even with the amplified sound, Veena attracts a few rasikas only. This is firstly because there are only few masters of this instrument. Secondly, the familiarity of the sounds of the Veena is becoming less and less. The film media has a great role to play in familiarizing sounds and symbols. The average South Indian films, if they have a choice between Sitar and Veena would have a sitar rather than Veena. In a movie (or a drama) even in typical South Indian contexts, one is sure to listen to the sounds of a sitar! Even if they use Veena music it would be sitarized Veena! For the present day film music composers, the western sounds are more fascinating and exotic to make it to the



box office. The masters of Veena should explore the potentials of the instrument for pure instrumental music, to give Veena a fresh lease of life.

Apart from the entertainment value, learning to master Veena is a spiritual discipline. Yogis have highly praised the spiritual powers of this great instrument. A real 'saadhaki' has this spiritual experience. Veena challenges the performer to integrate the sruti and laya (both spiritually and physically) through provision in the instrument for melody and tala. Apart from its associations with Gods and Goddesses Veena music is spiritual in yet another sense. The music of most popular instruments by the sheer power of sound projection with respect to volume and continuity, is able to reach the masses. But the music of the acoustic Veena is available only to those who sensitively 'extend themselves' to the instrument. The 'continuity' in Veena performance is an internal spiritual realization for a Veena player. The gaps in between the heard sound are not 'disruptions' in the mind of the performer. They are in fact meaningfully communicating a spiritual continuity through 'silence'. In this respect the seeming limitations in continual sound projection are in fact the source of a higher spiritual strength for the performer. This is the reason our fore-fathers have

insisted on even the vocalists learning Veena to refine their voice quality through its subtle and intricate sounds and start an inward journey to realize the anagata nada – that of the silence in the deeper spiritual depths.

Ask any renowned Veena player what his style of playing is like, he would answer immediately that it is close to a vocal style. Yes, Veena playing is close to the vocal style of singing.

Similarly the playing of other indigenous musical instruments used in our Carnatic musical tradition, like the nagaswaram and flute, the instruments adopted from the West, namely violin, clarinet, saxophone and even the mini-electric guitar now known here as "mandolin" are adopted to the vocal style when one has to play a melodic composition. (Due to the limitations of these instruments, in one way or other, in negotiating melismatic slow interpretations in Carnatic music, the players, nowadays, invariably exploit the 'rhythmic' strength of their respective 'borrowed' instruments in exciting listeners). This means that any instrumental style in the Carnatic tradition has necessarily to conform to the vocal performance. In other words, the singing style is the model for an instrumental style. In the scale we create here to 'measure' instrumental style in terms of the singing

style, we place the instrument with its uniqueness as a musical instrument at one end and at the other, the vocal model. In this stylistic scale the measurement of how each instrument balances with the "weights" of the vocal model is the most difficult task. Some instruments come close to the vocal rendering in certain respects and some others in certain other respects. For example, the violin as a bowing instrument even surpasses the vocal ability in musical continuity! The nagaswaram and flute will be close to the vocal rendering in this respect. But the 'acoustic Veena' cannot score much in this respect, since it is a plucked instrument.

Every Veena player feels he is close to the vocal style because of two reasons (1) he tries to play the way he would sing or follow the kind of singing he likes. (2) Veena as an instrument is closer to the human voice, than any other instrument, in its harmonic content. Those who are fanatically vocal-minded in their Veena playing, avoid the techniques that might 'disturb' the 'vocalness'. Those who love the sounds of the instrument do not mind exploiting such techniques that might add color to their performance of a song. The extent to which a performer exploits the instrument in interpreting a song determines the degree of 'closeness' to the voice.

In conclusion we might say that an instrument is an instrument primarily with its own advantages and disadvantages. Since our Carnatic system is vocal based, we have to conform to the vocal standards of rendering a composition. In the 'manodharmic' aspect there is a greater possibility of using the full potential of the instrument. Even in rendering a composition, following the vocal model, we cannot afford to ignore the merits of the instrument. Instrumental playing is in fact an exalting discipline both physically and spiritually. The voice brings words, denoting and connoting objects, bringing a certain physical meaning to music. This is why it has an immediate appeal and a regional significance. Instrumental music transcends words to the purer world of the naada. Instrumental playing in a philosophic sense extends the self and merges with the object. In other words the instrumental performer as a naada yogi dissolves the hiatus between the object and the subject. The instrument becomes the extension of the performer's self.

*Keynote address delivered at the Veenarpanam Seminar on the occasion of Sri Kanchi Mahaswamy Peetharohana Shatabdi Mahotsav held at Bharatiya Music & Arts Society on December 5, 2006*



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## **MUSIC EDUCATION : A Review and Reforms**

by **Ms. Maneesha Kulkarni**, Department of Music, University of Mumbai

*Three existing channels of Music Education viz. Institutions only for Music Education, Institutions where Music is taught as one of the subjects and Guru Shishya Parampara have their limitations. A review of the present scenario of Music Education compels us to give a fresh thought to the aims, syllabi, teaching methods and evaluation systems. Reforms in all these aspects are the need of the hour.*

India is a nation of diverse cultures and so is Indian Music. Our nation has several ethnic groups, speaking their own languages and dialects, having very distinct cultural traditions. Plato has rightly said "If you want to measure the cultural and spiritual depth of a society, make sure to mark its music." Music has always occupied central place in Indian culture. Right from the Vedic era, Indian Music has been flourishing. Indian Music comprises of multiple varieties of folk, regional, popular, fusion, film and classical music. In the era of Information Technology, any kind of Music is just a click away. Radio, Television, Music Festivals, film Music, Cassettes, CDs, Internet are all media of entertainment. Also, there is an alarming demand from the media section that aims to cater the daily entertainment dose to the various audiences. All these media have created ample opportunities for artists to show their talent. These are also media of mass education and have created general awareness towards music. Sometimes, it is surprising to see the extent

to which the young students of music have the talent to imitate their idols without having any personal contact or coaching from that great artist.

This talent has to be groomed as these youngsters would be the torch bearers of Indian Music. There is no dearth of musical training in India. If we see the current scenario of Music Education, we will find that Music Education is mainly given through the following three channels. The first channel comprises of the institutions established only for the purpose of Music Education. It includes different institutes / classes, Music Departments in Universities and Music Universities. The aim of Institutions established only for Music Education is to produce a 'Knowledgeable musician'. By 'Knowledgeable musician' we mean those who have knowledge of theoretical side and can perform in accordance with it.

The second channel is Educational Institutions where Music is taught as one of the subjects along with other subjects, viz. schools and colleges. Here the aim of Music education is to create taste for Music among the students. While growing up in schools and colleges, the young students form their attitudes, likes - dislikes and prejudices. Ideally, the schools should identify the young students having musical aptitude and initiate the musical training.

The third channel of Music Education is *Guru Shishya Parampara*. The aim of this



channel is to produce performers. The history of Music Education tells us that Music Education was traditionally given in the *Guru Shishya Parampara*. In the pre independence era, various provinces had given patronage to many musicians. Musicians then were not worried about meeting both the ends. The *Shishya-s* used to stay at *Aashrama*. They served their *gurus* with integrity. The *guru* used to teach the *shishya* only after being satisfied with his services, hard work and talent.

We cannot deny that it is only *guru - shishya - parampara* that has given brilliant, great and legendary performing artists, and it continues to do so. Even today in Classical Music, most of the performing artists are products of this tradition. In the post independence era, music lost its royal patronage and so the *guru-shishya-parampara* was severely shaken.

Today what we see as *guru-shishya-parampara* is just the remnants of this *parampara*. Now, the classes are held either individually or in a group, twice or thrice a week. So it is impossible to have *guru's* constant company and guidance which was the essence of *Guru Shishya Parampara*. Many a time, some of the good students could not afford the fees of well-known *guru-s*. Also, *Guru-shishya-parampara* does not have stipulated syllabus, time table, infrastructure, evaluation system and does not confer formal degree.

Institutional Music Education was established to lessen all the above mentioned limitations of *guru-shishya-*

*parampara*. Pt. V.N. Bhatkhande and Pt. V.D. Paluskar were pioneers of Institutional Music Education in India. Institutionalisation of Music Education enabled even common man to learn music easily. But Institutionalisation of Music Education has its own drawbacks. The time bound teaching within the four walls of the class rooms and teaching a large number of students are the major drawbacks. The classes of institutions have students of varying talents, tastes, qualities of voices and temperament. The crowded classes and low number of teaching staff make it difficult for students to get personal guidance or individual coaching which is very essential in Music learning. Consequently the teaching quality and excellence in the students are hampered.

In the Educational Institutions where Music is taught as one of the subjects, Music as a subject does not have importance at all. Other subjects are considered to be more important. Many a time teachers take Music classes to complete the syllabus of other so called important subjects. This makes it impossible for teachers to create taste for music among the students.

As discussed above, all the three channels of Music Education are having limitations. The review of the situation leads us to the realisation that we must give a fresh thought to the aims, syllabus, education methods and evaluation systems. Reforms in all these aspects are the need of the hour.

We would discuss all the above mentioned aspects and suggest reforms wherever possible.

**Aims of Music Education:** - The aim of music education in *Guru Shishya Parampara* is to create performing artists and in Institutional Music Education it is to create knowledgeable musicians. It has to be understood that every student can not become a performer. Even in *Guru Shishya parampara*, from amongst half a dozen students of a great *Ustad*, hardly three or four come out as great artists. So, one must think of alternative professions for Music students so that they would be able to lead successful professional life. Keeping this in mind the following could be the aims of Music Education. To create:

1) Taste in Music 2) knowledgeable musicians 3) performing artists 4) Music Teachers 5) Research Scientists 6) Music critics 7) Successful Professionals in Music related areas. For this, the students should have the option to select and study any one or two of the following applied music subjects.

1) Music Direction 2) Music Arrangement 3) Sound Recording 4) Documentation and preservation of Folk Music 5) Instrument making and maintenance 6) Music Journalism 7) Music Compering 8) Event Management (Musicians need to organise different festivals, discussions, events. For this he/she must know how to manage this event.)

Thus, according to new needs of society, music education should be more and more encompassing and profound.

**Syllabus:** - The syllabus of any subject is an instrument to achieve the set aims.

Though, the UGC has given some guidelines considering the problems relating to the standardization of theory and practical syllabus through various universities, each university has to adapt it considering the infrastructure and quality of the students. Some basic principles have to be followed while designing Music Curricula. Music being a performing art, the practical side of Music Education is of prime importance. But the balance has to be maintained. While designing the practical curriculum, the quality of training should not be hampered at the cost of quantity of training. Hence, in the initial training, number of *Ragas* should be less and proper attention should be given to the students' *swargyana*, acquiring steady voice and breath control. Without having this foundation training in voice culture, the students wouldn't make any progress.

While selecting *raga-s* in the syllabus, there should be linear progression and logic e.g. *Bhairav* should be taught first and then only, *Ramakali*, *Ahirbhairav*, *Bhairavbahar*, *Bhatiyar* should be taught. Similarly, *Shuddhkalyan*, *Puriyakalyan* should be taught only after *Yaman* is taught. Before teaching *Jod-raga-s* or *Mishra-raga-s* the component *raga-s* must be taught e.g. Before teaching *Jogkauns*, student must know both *Jog* and *Chandrakauns*.

The syllabus of music theory can be classified into two categories. 1: Applied Theory 2: Interdisciplinary Studies. The first category includes theory related to practicals. (e.g. *Swara*, *Taal*, *Vadi*, *Samvadi*, *Raag* theory, writing notation etc.). The second category includes inter-disciplinary



studies of music and sciences, music and arts.

- a) Pure Sciences (e.g. Physics, Biology etc.) and Music. This Classification includes subjects like Sound Physics, Sound Recording, Acoustics, Voice culture, Music therapy etc.
- b) Social Science (e.g. History, Geography, Sociology, Psychology etc.) and Music. This classification includes subjects like History of Music, Folk Music, Sociology of Music, Psychology of Music, Ethnomusicology etc.
- c) Languages, Fine Arts, Performing Arts, Aesthetics, Humanities and Music: For the study of ancient musical books of Indian music, students must have a basic knowledge of Sanskrit. Music and other arts are integral parts of our culture. These arts are inter connected. E.g. *Thumri* was formerly part of *Kathak* dance. The inter connection in Fine Arts and Performing Arts (e.g. Dance, Drama, Paintings, Sculptures, Theatre etc) can be taught under one subject called 'Cultural Heritage of India'. For this, simultaneous classes of different fine Arts can be held in which experts of different arts will introduce their subjects to the students. This will enable interaction among the students of various fine Arts. Aesthetics and criticism will also come under this classification. Similarly, languages like English and Hindi should be taught considering the functional development of the students.

**Infrastructure and teaching aids:** - Every Music Institution must have updated and well equipped books and audio library. Well maintained manual and electronic musical instrumental are a must. Well qualified and competent teaching staff and accompanists are the basic requirements of any music institution. A well equipped recording studio is very helpful to the students. The students can record their recitals periodically and evaluate the progress in their performance.

Besides, Music institutions must have hostel facility attached as it would give them ample opportunities to seek regular guidance from the teachers.

The print and electronic media have created a revolution in every aspect of our lives. In the modern times, the availability of internet connection is imperative in any Educational Institute. The CDs & cassettes of Ragas in syllabus, video tapes of performances, interviews or seminars, literature on Raga, theory literature, biographies etc. can be made available on Institute's website. For international students, Distance Education Courses in Music can be initiated via Internet Conferencing as it allows two way communication between expert and learner.

**Evolving Evaluation Procedure:** - Evaluation is an important element of education. In Institutional learning, the success of a student is determined by the marks he has obtained. In the modern era, it is said that education should be continuous and all-round. According to

modern educationists, teaching, learning and evaluation should be a simultaneous process. In one day of examination, the examiner would not be able to assess or evaluate knowledge, analytical power, skills, perseverance, hard work, creative ability and grasping power of the student. So, in addition to the year-end examination, there should be two unit-tests in a year.

To avoid irregularity and subjectivity in the practical exams '*Distribution of Marks Scheme*' should be followed. In this scheme all possible questions on syllabus are listed. These questions are classified according to the marks they carry and the question types. The examiner must ask the questions carrying certain marks. On the basis of the answers given, the examiner has to tick immediately one of the following options - very good, good, satisfactory and ok. The examiner has to ask questions only from the '*Distribution of Marks Scheme*' and give the grade instantly and then total marks are given.

**Extra Curricular activities:** - Listening sessions of Ragas should be organized regularly. Here teacher would explain the various facets of Raga with the help of recordings of great artists. Seminar, symposia, Lecture demonstrations, cultural exchange programmes, etc. would widen the horizon of students. Participation in various competitions and Institutional productions would give the students opportunities to show their talent.

**Music Teacher** - A music teacher may not be a great performing artist. But he must

have sound knowledge of theory and must be able to perform in tuneful voice with correct rhythmic punctuation. Otherwise, the students will have no faith in his teaching. The quality of teaching depends on teacher's own initiative, experience, creativity and dedication towards his profession.

It is said that one has to learn from a guru for at least 8 years to learn the *gayaki ang*. In the institutions, it would be beneficial if a student is under the tutelage of the same teacher every year to learn the *gayaki ang*.

Teachers should be exposed to a new environment via cultural exchange programmes, Orientation courses and refresher courses where they can interact with other teachers and also update themselves.

Ideally, for practical teaching, performers should be appointed and for music theory, musicologists should be appointed.

The ultimate aim of Music Education or any education for that matter is to awaken the thought process and imagination of the students. The teacher should encourage the students to sing their own *aalap*, *tans*, *sargam* and improvise them.

Finally, with the amalgamation of individualistic approach towards students, availability of modern infrastructure and competent and dedicated teachers we could certainly make Music Education in India scale new heights.



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## INTERVIEW

### THE VOICE WITH THE DIVINE SPARK - P. UNNIKRISHNAN

by Sudha Subramaniam



'Isai Peroli' by Karthik Fine Arts, 'Yuva Kala Bharathi' by the Bharath Kalachar, 'Kalaimamani' by the Govt. of Tamil Nadu, National Award for Best Male Playback

Singer, several awards from the Music Academy, Chennai and other prestigious Institutions; the list goes on ... yet Unnikrishnan, the awardee, rises far above those awards. His happy, wholehearted, endearing and affable nature has cast him as a hot favourite en masse. Unnikrishnan has also recorded evergreen numbers for Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam films, has several albums on cassettes and CDs to his credit. An 'A' grade artist with the All India Radio, he has rendered highly acclaimed concerts all over India, USA, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, the Far East, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

A very good cricketer, too, Unnikrishnan's innings in music has definitely been a winning one. His innings in cricket remain

confined to being a member of the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association and reminiscing on the days when he played as a top order batsman and wicket keeper in the Tamil Nadu Senior Division league. Of course, even today he finds time to swim as well as to play cricket at the Madras Cricket Club. Luckily for his hordes of music fans, his mother, Dr. Harini Radhakrishnan discerned his musical abilities and placed him under the tutelage of Sri V L Seshadri. Unni, born on 9th July 1966 to K. Radhakrishnan and Harini Radhakrishnan went on to do his schooling from the Asan Memorial School, then onwards to graduation from the Vivekananda College, Madras, in 1987. Furthering his studies with a Law and Post Graduate Diploma in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations, he joined Parrys Confectionery Limited where he worked from 1991 to 1994. Then Unni received his first film offer. His very first songs 'Ennavalae' (Kadalan) and 'Uyirum Neeeye' (Pavitra) catapulted him into fame. Unni himself feels things just sort of happened and there he was, receiving the National Award for the Best Male Playback Singer.

Right from his Great-grandfather, Dr.K. N. Kesari's days, Unnikrishnan's family home, Kesari Kuteeram, was a favourite haunt for artistes, singers and eminent personalities. Dr.K. N. Kesari was a renowned Ayurvedic



physician as well as the man behind the popular women's magazine, 'Gruhalakshmi'. Quite naturally, Unni imbibed a lot of cultural values and aesthetic sense from early childhood.

Happily married to Priya, a highly talented exponent of the Mohiniattam dance form, the couple has been blessed with a son, Vasudev Krishna and a daughter Uttara.

When we finally managed to get some time with Unni, who was as usual busy with his concerts, Priya was at Kerala for a performance. Good for her too! She is just reviving her art, now that Uttara is three years old.

Unravelling Unni's talent proved to be a curtain-raiser for us, since we gleaned an insight into the simplicity behind the greatness of Unni. This is what Unni said...

**Q)** You have trained with different Gurus. What are the insights you have gained?

**A)** The Carnatic musical journey commenced when my mother enrolled me as a disciple of Sri V.L.Seshadri. It was Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. Ramanathan who then took over. Later I studied under the able guidance of Calcutta Sri K.S.Krishnamurthy and Smt.Savitri Sathyamurthy. Once Dr. Ramanathan had a performance at Krishna Gana Sabha. He was extremely sick. On that day, he called me when he was singing Ragam Shankarabharanam and asked me to sing along with him. Initially nervous, I joined him. The performance was very well received and that was the starting point of a lot of public

appreciation and demand. All my Gurus inculcated in me a high degree of discipline and sense of responsibility. Early morning practice, commitment, according priority to gauging the depth of Carnatic music, these were strictly adhered to tenets which were as sure as the rising of the sun. Savitri Satyamurthy was very strict and extremely particular about perfection. When she took over, she trained me into an ardently disciplined student.

I also underwent a six month training in the Veena Dhanammal Bani under the tutelage of Sangita Kalanidhi T.Brinda and Sangita Kalanidhi T.Viswanathan (Bala Saraswathi's brother). I found the Dhanammal Bani very high in aesthetics. Initially it was very difficult, but once the uphill task was undertaken with rigorous discipline and total involvement, it was easy to adapt to.

Today I continue to train under Sri P.S.Narayanaswami and Prof. S.R.Janakiraman. From S.R. Janakiraman who is a musicologist, I have learnt a lot about the finer nuances of music too.

**Q)** You were a very passionate cricket player. Maybe you would have definitely made it to the national level. Today, you are a musician par excellence. Do you notice any similarity in cricket and music?

Unni laughed heartily, then said ...

**A)** The pitch is important in both cricket and music. The proper pitch on the playing ground is essential for a good game of cricket. So also, the control of voice, its proper modulation, that is, the right pitch (voice pitch) is of utmost importance for a successful singer. Moreover, as a Senior Division League Player, the audience strength was not as much as it is in my Carnatic Music Performances. In a Carnatic Music Concert, we keep the audience interest at heart. We perform for them. As a singer, I feel we are totally responsible for the audience. In cricket, team effort matters. In musical performances too, our accompanists are very important and it is good, synchronized and harmonious team work that spells success.

**Q)** Like Yesudas, you sing Classical music as well as film music very successfully. With over 1000 hit songs in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada movies, you have very ably bridged the classical music- film music divide. What do you have to say about this?

**A)** Well, let's put it this way. Learning Carnatic music in depth assists one to a great extent in singing the film songs. Yesudas is my inspiration in singing for films too. However, I did not plan anything. Everything happened by providence and I was taken totally unawares. It came as a pleasant surprise even to me that my very first film song had bagged me the National Award!

Singing only film songs can make one lose focus. To gain an insight into the depths of this great ocean that is Carnatic music, one needs to have highly illustrious Gurus. To make a successful career in film songs, voice modulation is very important. I learnt good voice modulation by singing for films. Since I had a good Carnatic music base, I could easily take on the swarams and the ragas in film music without thinking twice. I could even improvise instantaneously.

Moreover, all our film Music Directors are highly melodious. Ilayaraja, A.R.Rahman, Vidya Sagar, Sharat, Bharadwaj, Shekar, S.A.Rajkumar, Ilayaraja's son Kartik Raja, etc. are all highly talented, gifted and great to work with.

**Q)** You were part of the Youth Association for Classical Music. What role did this play in your life? What part does it play today?

**A)** The Youth Association comprised many good Carnatic singers such as Vijay Siva, Sanjay Subramaniam, R.K.Shriramkumar (violinist) who happened to be my College mates. My musical talents pooled us together. They played a great role in moulding me into the groove of Carnatic music. It is something like, "Tell me who your friends are; I'll tell who you are". We used to discuss music, music composers and musicians. Together we used to further the cause of Carnatic



music by organizing Kutcheris, etc. The Association gave us a sense of direction and purpose. It played a very important role in unswervingly keeping me latched onto the path of music. It provided us a good and valuable music-lovers' platform of discussion and performance. Yes, they were quality friends who helped me to catch up on a lot of Canatic music, since I got into it late.

Even today we are a part of the Association. We are seniors today and assist our juniors. We help in promoting and sustaining talent, like, for example, Abhishek Raghuraman, who is an upcoming star ...

**Q)** Have you had any instance of viewing divinity during any of your performances?

**A)** Music itself is close to the almighty. When I sing, I lose myself totally in the song, in its beauty, its enormity of expression. I perceive the divinity as All-pervading. On 27th November 2007, when I was singing Kesari Nandana at the Veda Sachidananda Swami Ashram in Chennai, at one particular point, a red chembarathi (Hibiscus) flower suddenly popped out of the Alankaram and fell. Many people noticed it and they even made an announcement.

As a young lad of eighteen years, I was selected to sing the prayer song for M.S.Subbulakshmi's cassette release function at the Chennai Music

Academy. Later, M.S. Amma herself called me and told me that I had sung very well. She then invited me to her home, spoke to me, gave me Chukku Capee (dry ginger essence added coffee) and praised my talent. This was but divinity at work, to be praised by one as divine as M.S. Subbulakshmi.

Divine grace has indeed played a great part in my life. Around twelve years ago, Mr. Ramakrishna of the Transworld group happened to pick up my cassette at Guruvayoor. He liked it so much that the Transworld Group brothers have ever since been my sponsors. They are like family to me, always supporting me and encouraging me. It is the Transworld Group who sponsored my recent performance at the Asian Community Centre-Mall of The Emirates. The audience was wonderful. I sang pure classical numbers like Ragam Tanam Pallavi in Kapi, Lathangi, Kalyani, etc.

**Q)** What is your opinion of worthy organizers, sabhas and sponsors?

**A)** The sabhas encourage us a lot. They do look after us well. We understand that they too have to manage their finances, get sponsorships; there are so many angles which require to be worked out for a performance. There are a lot of good people like Mr.Murali Krishna of Shri Krishna Sweets, Kuppuswami Chettiar of Nalli, etc. who do a lot for the cause of Fine Arts.

**Q)** Who is your favourite composer and which is your favourite song?

**A)** All our composers are great. Dikshithar and Thyagaraja touch a chord in my heart with their depth and devotion. I can feel the vibrations while rendering the krithis. It is not as though one fine day they took their pen and started writing. Their compositions have been written by perceiving the almighty and the divinity has flowed from their pens, translating itself into soulful music. The trinity of Indian Music, Dikshithar, Thyagaraja and Shyama Shastri are indeed to be revered. I am awed by Gopalakrishna Bharathi. I find the Subramaniya Bharatiyar songs so powerful. When we sing them we express the India that surfaced from our hopes.

**Q)** Which experience would you say as worth narrating regarding your singing for films?

**A)** Well, I can think of a particularly challenging instance. Normally, I can very easily tackle the different ragams and swarams and make any necessary improvisation while singing film songs. However, there was this song, 'Sudha Manthram' which I sang for the Malayalam movie 'Devadasi', composed by Music Director A.Sharad, which took me four to five hours to sing!

It was so intricately interwoven with different ragas!

**Q)** You have given concerts in USA, the Middle East, United Kingdom, Far East, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, etc. Which audience do you feel is most receptive to Carnatic music?

**A)** The audience in all these places loved Carnatic music and appreciated it. In the USA, Australia, Dubai, etc. we have a very good South Indian crowd. In the European countries, they respected the art, tried to perceive it, appreciated it and of course even wanted us to explain things to them so that they could understand better. But they are very focused.

**Q)** How does your family relate to music?

**A)** We are ardent lovers of art. Priya is right now performing Mohiniattam at Ottapalam in Kerala. Our son, Vasudev Krishna is learning Classical music from Shriram Kumar. He is also learning the Piano (Western Classical) at Musee Musicals. Uttara is just three.

Well, thanks, Unni, for sparing so much of your valuable time for us. You have indeed added a lot of value to our time as well as to our times. □

## ERRATA

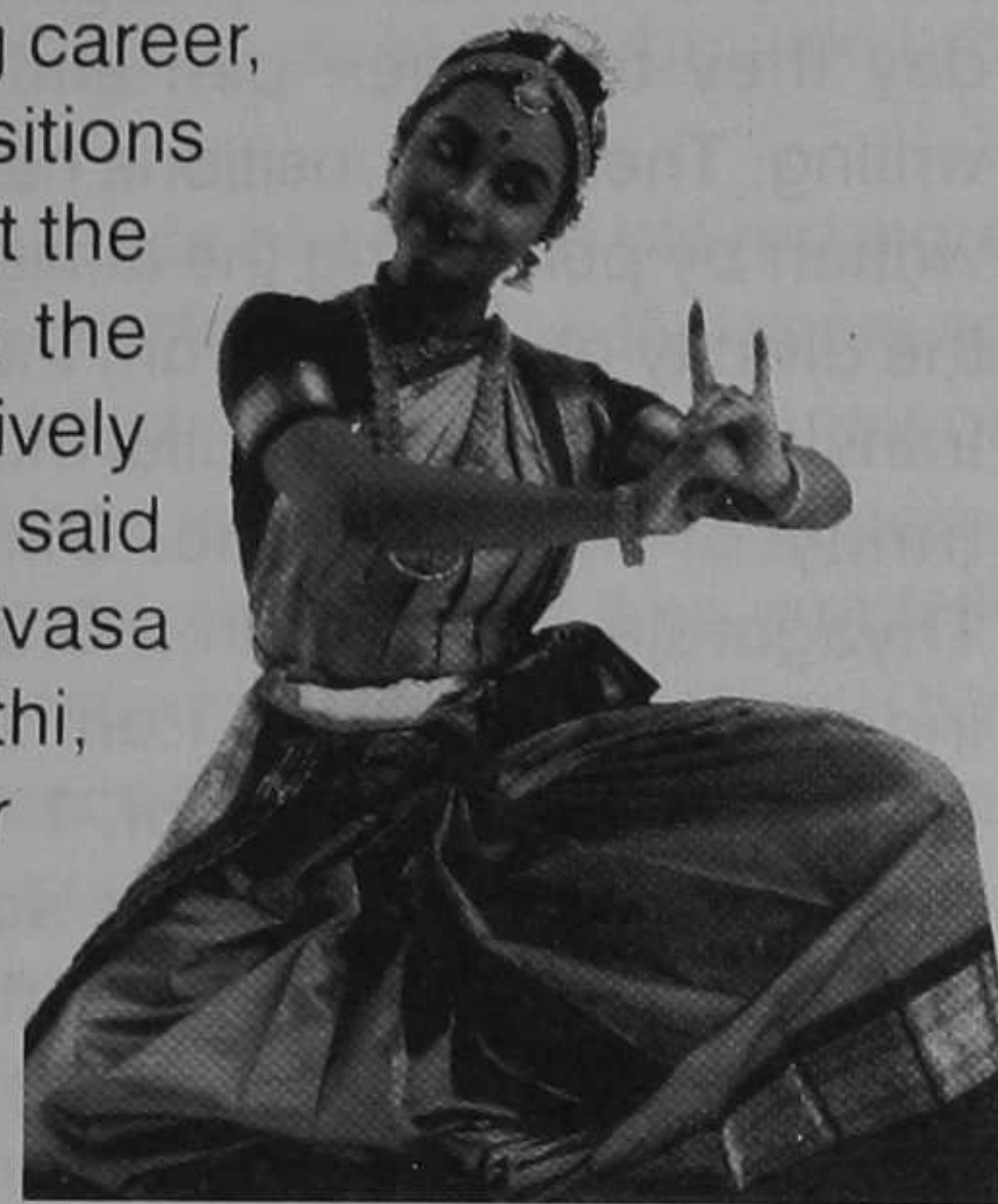
In the July - September 2007 issue the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in the article "Sree Gurave Namaha" on P - 43 stands deleted. The error is regretted.



## CARNATIC CLASSICALS

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"With my experience of 70 years of performing career, editing Sri Swati Tirunal Maharajah's compositions and of others, I can assert with confidence that the work of Sri N. Rajagopalan in bringing out the 'Garlands' is not only praiseworthy but is positively a stupendous and unparalleled achievement", said Sangita Pithamaha, Dr. Semmangudi Srinivasa Ayyar. Sangita Kala Acharya T. S. Parthasarathi, Dr. Sulochana Rajendran and other senior authorities hailed the pioneering endeavour in the highest of terms. All know that it was born of chaste love and *nishkama* dedication to fill the void left by eminent Subbarama Dikshitar, Abraham Pandithar, U.Ve. Swaminatha Ayyar and Prof. Sambamurti.



"**A Garland**" (1990) has been out of stock for several years. Requests for the book have been naturally persistent since it is a thesaurus, storehouse of vital information for instant reference of researchers, scholars, musicians, musicologists, students and everyone else in the line. It was taken up to enlarge its contents and update contents as far as possible. The hefty volume, now with Printers, titled "**The Eloquent Garland**" has been made available from December 2007. Those interested may contact at the above address.

Limited stocks of *Another Garland, Yet Another Garland, Fragrant Garland, Melodic Garland, Holistic Garland, Twin Garlands* are available. "*A Fragrant Garland for Sri Maha Swami - Saint and Sangita*" has been published by Sri M.S.P.S.M. Trust, Mumbai.

## BHARATANATYAM ON A ROLL

by A. Seshan



Indian classical dances are increasingly taking to new ways of doing old things. We have experiments like dancing to Tchaikovsky's *Overture to Romeo and Juliet* (Padma Subrahmanyam) or Gregorian chants (Astad Deboo) or Vivaldi (Daksha Seth) or Kabbadi (Birju Maharaj). There is another trend where different styles are fused in an integrated manner, especially in a dance drama. The *avant-garde* approach is as old as Rukmini Devi and Uday Shankar in the 1930s and was accepted even by the orthodox then because they were within the framework of *Natya Sastra*. Thus the kalaripayattu (Kerala's martial art) was introduced in the battle scenes of *Meenakshi Kalyanam* by Rukmini Devi. It merged seamlessly with the rest of the pure classical dance form of Bharatanatyam.

In the West dancing on roller-skates is popular. One sees dancing on ice skates on television. But Bharatanatyam on roller-skates? One did not hear of it until recently, when a 10-year old boy burst on the scene with his innovation. Kasirajan, son of Ramalingam Saravanan of Hindustan Lever in Puducherry (formerly Pondicherry), is studying in the 7th Standard and learning Bharatanatyam from Kalaimamani Jayashri Narayanan since 2005 and preparing for the Certificate Course in Annamalai University. He is also being trained in Carnatic music (vocal) by Mathangi, an AIR artiste in Puducherry. Kasi is learning skating under Mr. Pavankumar, who is an international referee and National Coach for Roller Skating. He used to teach skating elements for free style and figure skating for the duration of 5 sessions (3 days) every month but not the dance. Kasi has been encouraged by his parents and well-wishers in his artistic pursuit as a result of which he has been able to give a number of performances on skates besides those in the regular format. At the National Integration Camp in Puducherry attended by 650 NCC cadets a few months ago, he gave a performance which impressed Commando Prasad so much that he invited the former as a guest to the camp fire, followed by dinner. Newspapers and journals like Outlook have carried reports on his talents. In November 2007 the National Institute for Performing Arts (NIPA)



invited Kasirajan to perform during the 11th International Children's Theatre Festival at Delhi. He had a number of other engagements in the city for nearly a week. Kasi's interests extend to many other extra-curricular activities like drawing, karate (Yellow Belt), yogasanas, figure skating and children's theatre. He has won prizes from eminent personalities including the Chief Minister of Puducherry. He has appeared on the Puducherry TV many times.

Recently Kasirajan participated in Natya Sagara 2007 organised by Kanaka Sabha Centre for the Performing Arts, Chembur, Mumbai, and [www.kanakasabha.com](http://www.kanakasabha.com). It was in the form of a dance competition for different age groups and was arranged to celebrate the International Dance Day sponsored by UNESCO. The competition was tough and he won a consolation prize in the junior category. But what wooed the large audience was his demonstration of dancing on skates outside the competition. Eyebrows were raised when the announcement was made as it was something unheard of or unseen in the Mumbai art circle. This reviewer was curious to know how it would look in the context of a classical style like Bharatanatyam with its strict framework. But his doubts were cleared as soon as Kasirajan ascended the stage and did his first rolling round of obeisance. His review on a popular website follows: One can say that such aspects as abhinaya do not get disturbed by skates. Adavus were done on

the usual lines. Perhaps, the only element that may be difficult to execute is the footwork. One cannot expect the type of *azhuttam* that one sees in a normal dance. But even here one could see at least a few of the positions like *kunchita padam*. There was no question of tripping over due to the loss of balance at any stage as Kasirajan had a firm grip on his skates and feet as well as on his dance. His Nataraja pose was steady, perfect and effortless. Appropriately he selected Muthu Tandavar's famous song in *Mayamalavagaulai* in *Adi*. The pallavi is '*Aadikkondaranda Vedikkai Kaanakkan Aayiram Vendamo?*' It means: Does it not require 1000 eyes to see the fun of the dance of Nataraja?

"While such innovations are welcome one needs to be cautious about their fitting in with the total ambience of a classical dance like Bharatanatyam. For a Westerner going into the church wearing shoes may be part of his normal attire. But, in India, it may look odd for a dancer to wear shoes to stand on the skates and make an obeisance either to Lord Ganesh or Lord Nataraja or the gurus or the audience. In fact, whoever goes up on stage for some purpose or the other removes his footwear before doing so, as it is considered disrespectful otherwise. Also, Nataraja wearing shoes could be a shocker! This is not to discourage the young boy from pursuing his talents further but to caution him on the need to dovetail them to the sensibilities of the dance form."

□

## MUSIC THERAPY: TOWARDS RE-DISCOVERING INDIA'S GLORY!

By T. V. Sairam\*

*"Music brings a stability to humanity in an uncivilized time, It is soothing, comforting and reminds us that there's still beauty left in the world!" - Denyce Graves, the American opera singer.*

Recent advances in science and giant strides made in neuro-imaging techniques have opened up new horizons for our understanding the brain functions. Scientists are developing research that shows clear physiological links between melody and the mind - a connection which was well known to the followers of an ancient Indian healing tradition, Nada Yoga.

A fascinating field of science, popularly referred to as a neuro-musicology' is fast emerging, to throw light on the most complex organ of the human body, the brain, and its equally puzzling functions,

Inputs of selective sound and music have been examined for their impact on the brain,

The popular American opera singer, Denyce Grave lent her brain for a recent study by neurologists at a laboratory at George town in Washington D.C, which revealed that three different musical selections (two operating recordings of which one was her own and a rock hit) affected the brain differently. The study revealed that the singer's brain showed more cognitive involvement in listening to her familiar operatic songs, rather than to the unfamiliar rock music.

Fred Moreno of the New York Academy of Sciences would call music as a complex human behaviour

In Nada Yoga, the whole spectrum of frequencies in a musical octave was found to be in association with the energy frequencies of the human body.

In this system, the energy-centres or Chakras (chakraasthanas) which are seven in number were synchronized to each of the seven swaras (swaraasthanas) of a musical octave through sheer concentration. In course of time, by manipulating the changes in the frequencies in the musical octave (through ascending or descending order - aroha and avaroha, respectively), the desired chakraasthanas, representing a distinct state of consciousness could be reached with ease and alacrity.

Recent developments in neurosciences confirm that the emerging discipline 'neuromusicology', will scientifically reveal the dynamism and richness, otherwise hidden in our musical experiences and which were recognized and applied in the ancient practices around the world and in nada yoga, in the Indian sub-continent.

The sound of music is being applied - from



battling cancer- to excavating memories in Alzheimer's patients, to relieving pain and to tap high marks in the examinations - in every field of human interest.

New studies also indicate that listening to and playing music actually can alter how our brains, and thus our bodies function.

Music therapy has gained new grounds as an effective intervention to those among us who are sick-bodily and/or mentally- as it promises enhancement of 'quality of life', at the same time consoling or alleviating their sufferings. Though it is a budding field, the job market for music therapy has gone up by 30% - just in one year - between 1998 and 1999.

#### **How India could contribute to the development of Music Therapy?**

It is estimated that there is a body of at least 15,000 trained music therapists available in advanced countries, who are actively engaged all around the world and it is estimated that by 2010, the requirement for them will cross the 1,50,000 figures.

India known for the richness of its musical

tradition and the people already trained professionally in music, is virtually sitting on the golden mine for new job creations!

She can fill this great void admirably if organizations (both governmental and non-governmental) come forward to create adequate training infrastructure to straight away convert all these musicians (most of them jobless or under employed now) into practising therapists.

Universities and educational institutions should also come forward to develop this applied field of music, instead of wholly devoting their resources exclusively to music as an academic curriculum - as being done now.

Research institutions and medical colleges can play a greater role by sensitizing the medical professionals - doctors and paramedical staff - into this new-found area of employment, so that their services too could be qualitatively enhanced with music. Who knows, after IT and bio-technology, music therapy could be the forerunner in re-discovering the glory that was India!

□

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#### BOOK REVIEW

### **THE SPLENDOUR OF THE RAMPUR SAHASWAN GHARANA**

by Dr. Shubha Badami

**The Splendour of the Rampur-Sahaswan Gharana** of Hindustani music; its evolution, history, characteristics and compositions.

By **Sakuntala Narasimhan**

Publisher: Veenapani Centre for Arts, 217, 8-F Main, 3rd Block, Jayanagar Bangalore-560 011

Price: Rs. 220 186 pages.

For people interested in Indian music, here at last, is a book that is value for money. This is perhaps the only book available in English, which focuses on an individual gharana of Hindustani music, illuminating its history, lineage, features, exponents, and patrons, in depth. The study seeks to trace this music school's history and evolution through the last 200 years. It documents information about some of its leading artistes to provide a permanent record of an important chunk of our musical heritage This it has done, with impressive authority.

More importantly, far from remaining a reference book for the scholarly reader, it ensures that the layman, is kept entertained and enriched as he picks up the book whilst browsing through his favorite bookstore.

The book not only elaborates the features of the gharana's music but also gives the reader a glimpse into the lives of the great

ustads...the ustad - shagird or guru-shishya lifestyle. Interesting and often amusing anecdotes, lend a human touch to ustads who have been held in such awe.

The book unfolds like a story, is eclectic and entirely readable...It gives the reader an understanding of the kind of perseverance and single mindedness of the exponent that helped in the creation of the sometimes soul stirring, sometimes stimulating, but always, powerful, music of the gharana.

The author elaborates on the many unique features of this gharana's music and techniques of the ustads. So informed, when listening to the taranas sung by Mushtaque Hussain Khan Saheb, Nissar Hussain Khan Saheb or to Ustad Rashid Khan, the last, my favourite, one is better able to appreciate the style and the music...those fast tongue twisting taans delivered with such élan and clarity, at mind blowing speed, the meends executed with such grace....never a jarring note! The listener is held spell bound.

The royal courts of princely rulers of the pre-independence period played a very vital role in nurturing, fostering, and promoting classical music The Rampur Nawabs exemplified this, through munificent grants of salaries, land, life tenures, and other gifts that relieved the



artistes from the worries and compulsions of earning to support families. The Rampur Nawabs were not only passionate patrons of music but a few of them, Nawab Raza Ali Khan, for example, also composed great music. The book contains notations of about 40 rare compositions including taranas from the repertoire of the Gharana. About 24 are Rampur Gharana compositions and the others have been sung by the noted exponents of the Gharana. It is difficult to find notations for Hindustani Classical songs...even on the Internet...so this book is a real treat for those who have heard and have longed to learn and sing some of their favourite khayals/cheez with lyrical and melodious accuracy.

The book also contains notation for a Chaturang (rarely heard these days) composed by Nawab Raza Ali Khan. This particular composition in Raga Brindabani Sarang, when sung, evokes images of a Royal durbar and a grand orchestra.

An interesting observation that the author makes is regarding the documentation of traditional compositions. When Pandit Bhatkande, the pioneer of compilation in the second and third decades of the last century, decided to document the oeuvre of different gharanas, most ustaads were contemptuous of his attempt to write notation for classical compositions and were wary of parting with their precious knowledge. In 1910, the Rampur ruler,

Hamid Ali Khan, commanded the durbar ustaads to help Bhatkande, who was then able to listen to, and write notation for hundreds of khayal, dhrupad, and dhammar compositions. Historians of music will remember this with gratitude.

An anecdote that causes goose bumps in the reading is the recounting of the invoking of the rain god! Mushtaque Hussain Khan sang miyan ki malhar in the Malhar festival at Rampur mid-last century, and the clouds opened up, it is said. The personal faith of a Nawab-composer did not deter him from creating a beautiful hori or a kajri in praise of kanhaiya. Music knew no narrow bigoted walls!

The author creates a curiosity & interest about music of the Rampur-sahaswan gharana, provoking the reader to listen to music, not only from this Gharana but other Gharanas...to compare, to recognize and identify the different styles and explore this wonderful world of Hindustani Classical music with a more focused appreciation. With wider communication networks today and greater exposure to different styles through radio, audio tapes, cds and vcds, even the concept of gharanas, each with specific characteristics, stands threatened. All the more reason, why the richness of the Rampur-Sahaswan gharana should be preserved for posterity, as a sample of what art and artistes were like, in the days of the old durbars, nawabs, and princely patronage.

□

## BUDDING TALENT

by Sudha Subramaniam with inputs from Jyothi Mohan



It was indeed heartening to note that 16 year old Rajna Swaminathan, residing and schooling in Maryland, Washington, who is an accomplished mridangist, playing for concerts since age 11, is back in India once again, this time taking a break from playing for concerts in Chennai to play at the Essar Hall, Bhaudaji Road, Matunga on Sunday, the 9th of December. The Principal and Director of Sri Shanmukhananda Sangeetha Mahavidyalaya, Smt. Radha Namboodiri sang true to her mentor Semmangudi's inimitable bani. She was accompanied by Rajna on the Mridangam and the well known senior violinist Madhavan on the Violin. The audience likened the performance to Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer singing, with the likes of Palghat Mani Iyer and Umayalpuram Sivaraman on the mridangam.

Since Rajna a promising disciple of the

veteran Sri Umayalapuram K. Sivaraman was making her debut before the Mumbai audience, Smt. Radha Namboodiri had planned her concert with care, to include different talas, so as to enable Rajna to exhibit her prowess in all of them.

The concert commenced with the Bhairavi Ata Tala varnam- *Viriboni* sung in 2 kalam, followed by a brisk *Deva Deva* in Mayamalavagowla. A majestic rendering of *Pahimam Sri Rajarajeshwari* in Janaranjani was well appreciated. An elaborate, scholarly Varali preceded Dikshitar's *Mamava Meenakshi* in misra chapu. Neraval and swaras were in the typical Semmanagudi bani. Rajna's accompaniment was very mature and belied her age. After a fast *Padavini* in Salaga Bhairavi, Radha Namboodiri took up Shankarabharanam. Unfolding it in a leisurely manner, she brought out all its



shades of stately grandeur. The kriti *Shankaracharyam* was sung with great feeling and finesse. Rajna's tani that followed drew spontaneous appreciation from the knowledgeable audience that had gathered there. A lively *Saravanabhava* was followed by the javali, *Parulannamata* in Kapi. Swathi Tirunal's lilting *Dhanasri tillana* followed by the slokam, *Mangalam Kosalendraya* brought us to the end of an erudite presentation by Smt. Radha Namboodiri. Sri Madhavan's beautiful delineation of ragams as well as *neraval*, *swarams* embellished the recital.

Rajna impressed with her clear, deft strokes. She has imbibed her mentor, Sri Umayalapuram Sivaraman's style faithfully. Though there is power in those slender hands, of which she gave ample evidence in the tani, her accompaniment had the bhavyam and subtlety lacking in most young accompanists today. Not once did she try to drown the main artiste or try to overshadow her. With that distinguished tutelage and attitude and her obvious dedication, Rajna should go very far and establish herself as a leading *mrudangist* in the years to come.

As Rajna puts it, "At the age of fourteen, when I first came to India and played at the Chennai circuit, I saw the response from the audience and gauged the intense musical atmosphere. After returning home from India, I felt a sort of feverish motivation encompass me. That's when *Mrudangam* truly became my focus. Touring and performing alongside my Guru in 2004,

playing for stalwarts like Dr.N.Ramani who challenge me to fulfil my potential and listening to my Guru's stunningly inspiring performances have been my chief motivating factors in the consistent endeavour towards perfection".

With so much talent in her, no wonder Rajna is a regular speaker at percussion camps in America and a faculty at the Percussive Arts Society and the Kesa Percussion Camp. She gives lec-dems too. Rajna's father, Mr. Swaminathan, is a scientist by profession with a passion for the *mrudangam*. It was her father's dream that Rajna should be groomed into an accomplished artiste, which led to her initial training from her father from the tender age of five.

Her love for India draws her here twice a year, mainly for concerts in Chennai, once during June-July, then during the December Music Festival.

President V. Shankar stated that Sri Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha was planning a series of programmes to feature the senior disciples of the legendary Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer during his centenary year to familiarise the young *rasikas* and serious students of music with the master's contribution to *carnatic* music and his inimitable style of singing. The vocal recital by Smt. Radha Namboodiri, one of his senior disciples and also the Principal of Sri Shanmukhananda Sangeetha Vidyalaya, could be the first of this series. □

## HAPPENINGS AT THE VIDYALAYA

October is always a high-pressure month for the Vidyalaya – for the students, because it's the time for annual exams, for the teachers, even more so, as it's the acid test of their teaching, and the time when they have to juggle classes, concerts and Navaratri celebrations. November gave a breather and December was rehearsal time (for Bharatiar day). Never a dull moment here.

### NAVARATRI CELEBRATIONS

Saraswati pooja was celebrated at the Vidyalaya with a pooja on 20th Oct, 2007, followed by a recital of Navavarana kritis and Navaratri kritis by the disciples of Kalyani Sharma.

Vijayadashami was celebrated with the customary pooja, followed by rendition of the basic *Carnatic* lessons by all students and faculty. New admissions were commenced on this auspicious day. Around 200 new students were enrolled taking the total strength of the Vidyalaya to 386.

### S. SESHADRI MEMORIAL TALENT EXPOSURE CONCERT - 13th Oct 2007

Divyasree, 5th year student of the Vidyalaya gave a concert with predominantly *Devi* kritis for Navaratri – 2 *Dikshitar* kritis *Hariyuvatim* in *Hemavati* and *Pahi Maam Parvati* in *Mohanam* and *Mata Parashakti* (a *Bharatiyar* composition). Blessed with a good voice, she needs to work on her *gamakas*, and improve her pronunciation in the Indian languages. She attempted *alapana* for *Mohanam* *raagam*.

Rajeswari Vishwanathan, 2nd year KVC diploma student, gave a commendable recital in the seniors' slot. Notably, her *Todi alapana* was good judging from the phrases that she was trying to express from a deep *kelvi gnaanam*. *Shree Krishnam Bhaja Maanasa* was the kriti to follow with *neraval* and *kalpana swaras* at *Shankha Chakra Gadaa*. The other items in her concert were *Vandenishamaham* in *Hamsadhwani* by Mysore Vasudevachar, *Nannu Brova* in *Abhogi* by Tyagaraja, an *Annamachariyar* kriti in *Bahudari Idara Deva Thala* and *Karunai Deivame* in *Sindhu Bhairavi* by Madurai T. Srinivasan to round it off.

Suguna Ramachandran on the violin and Finix Ramachandran on the *mrudangam* accompanied the above artistes.

### 1st December, 2007

Eleven year old Manoj Aravind performed in the junior slot accompanied by Pravin Venkatraman on the violin and Aditya Rajagopalan on the *mrudangam*. Manoj was able to render the *varnam* and kritis, and also do scale-based *alapana* (*Mohanam*) and *kalpana swaras* (for *Enneramum*, a *Shyama Shastri* kriti in *Poorvikalyani* *raagam*, *Misra Chaaputalam*) correctly, however, he needs to now focus on *gamakas*, and imbibe *raga bhaava*. This can be achieved by continuous listening to good music and focused *akaara sadhakam* and singing of *varnams*.

Ms. Priya Rajeev, a first-year KVC diploma student followed up, with a neat recital,





containing a couple of rare kritis, like Muthiah Bhagavathar's Vageeshwari in Saraswathi raagam, and Avataram enduku, a Tyagaraja kriti in Harikamboji raagam. Her facile voice aided her in presenting a good kalyani alapana, neraval and swaras for Pankajalochana. Indeed, a very promising youngster, who is sure to go places, with constant practice.

**MUTHUSWAMY DIKSHITAR DAY - 10th November, 2007**



Vidya Harikrishna opened the Dikshitar day celebrations with a pleasing recital. Gananayakam in Rudrapriya created an atmosphere of sowkhyam, while the sprightly Parvati Kumaram Bhavaye in Natakuranji with a chittaswara helped maintain the tempo. Vidya chose two prati madhyama ragas to elaborate - Nasikabhushani and Varaali. Electricity decided to play truant during the Varaali alapana and chose to return only at the end

of Vidya's recital, though she did not miss a beat and sang right through it all, power cut and Deepavali cracker noise notwithstanding.

One got a sense of what concerts must have been like in the days of yore, with no mike, and no harsh electric lights. The room was illuminated only by the single oil lamp, glowing on the smiling visage of Dikshitar. Vidya wrapped up with Chetashri, which surprisingly had strong shades of Yadukulakamboji, and somehow seemed to miss the essence of Dwijavanti.

Janaki Krishnamoorthi and Anuradha Srivatsa fittingly gave a veena recital for this day of the "vainika-gayaka" (as Dikshitar calls himself in his Bhairavi masterpiece Balagopala). It was a neat recital with the duo taking good advantage of playing in tandem on stringed instruments-Janaki frequently used the second or third strings to play the same phrases as Anuradha on the first string. Janaki did alapana for Shanmukhapriya followed by the kriti Siddhi Vinayakam. Seasoned mridangist Shankarnarayanan closely followed the sahyam thus enhancing the effect. The rare Madhava Manohari kriti Mahalakshmi followed. The listener experience would have been enhanced if one or both of them could have also sung the kritis, especially such rare ones. Anuradha's Begada alapana and Thyagarajaya Namaste followed, with Poorvikalyani alapana by Janaki and Meenakshi Memudam. The delectable part of a veena recital, taanam in the ghana ragas, was included in this one too, with Manirangu replacing Shree, since the closing kriti was Maamava Pattabhirama.

Dr. N. Sekar's was the last recital of the day opening with the Mohanam kriti Nagalingam, not heard too often. He elaborated Simhendramadhyamam (Paamara Jana Paalini), Shankarabharanam (Brihadeeshwaraya Namaste) and Madhyamavati (Dharmasamvardhani). Though flashes of pleasing phrases were seen in his alapanas, more confidence and composure would have surely enhanced the overall effect of his recital.

Savita Vishwanathan provided violin support for the vocal recitals.

**MAHAKAVI SUBRAMANYA BHARATIYAR DAY - 29th December, 2007**

Bharatiyar had forty odd children from the Vidyalyaya, dancing to, and singing his fiery poetry



Guru Jyothi Mohan's 4th year disciples, Bhagyalakshmi, Chaitali, Gowri, Herambh, Jhanvi, Laxmi and Supriya depicted Krishna's antics to Nityashree's recording of Theerada Vilayattu Pillai. It was a commendable performance, considering that this was the students' first exposure to abhinaya, and that most of the participants, do not know Tamil. The "Pullanguzhal kondu varuvaan" interludes were used to depict the various gopis

abandoning their work, like drawing water from the well, putting a child to sleep, churning buttermilk, and so on, to listen transfixed to the divine flutist.

It was a joy to listen to the spirited rendition of Odivilaiyadu papa, set to a folk tune and Olipadaitha Kanninai Va Va Va by the 2nd year tiny tots. Anirudh Nair, Aparna, Arvind Nair, Balaji N, Dhamini, Gayatri, Maitreyi, Navneeth Kumar, Samhita, Sreenidhi and Tanvi.



Their third year 'seniors', Abhishek, Gopalan, Lakshmi, Pavitra, Shreya Warriar, Sonali Shivkumar, Srujana, Swathi Warriar, Vaishnavi and Varun, sang Varuvai Varuvai in Darbari Kanada and Chuttumvizhi Chudarthan Kannamma in a Ragamalika. Praise goes to Smt Usha Shankar their beloved child-teacher who must have really worked to channelize the young uns' energies.

The 5th year students, Anchana P, Deepita Rao, Pavitra, Sneha and Subhiksha, trained by Smt. Lalita Iyer rendered the prayerful Vellai Thamarai in Abheri and Maatha Parashakti, a ragamalika.

This was followed by a good presentation of Kani Nilam Vendum in Hamsadhwani and Tiruvai Panindu in Mand by 6th year students Dharini V and Krittika R, trained by Smt. Sita Ganesh.



The 6th & 7th year students Ananya, Aishwarya, Anirudh, Akanksha, Pradeeksha, Ranjani and Vineeth trained by our in-house Bharatiyar songs expert Smt. J. Susheela Mani, rendered a set of four songs, Ethanai Kodi inbam in Ahir Bhairav, Allah in Revathi, Nenchi Uramumindri in Chenchurutti, Nenchukku Neethiyum in Shankarabharanam (this composition is believed to have been set in this band tune by Bharatiyar himself).

A particularly interesting piece is Allah, a fine composition that not only exemplifies the secularity of its Hindu poet, but more importantly the secularity of Carnatic music too – which is so often mistakenly identified with a particular religion, due to the massive bank of compositions relevant to that religion. The way forward for classical music and dance, is to make it as accessible as possible for all people, to

demystify it, whether it means fusion concerts, using ragas in film music, singing compositions in native languages, composing and emoting to contemporary themes, or roping in the media to give it the “cool” factor.

The immaculate, perfection-oriented training of their veteran guru Meera Nathan was evident in the recital of Jyotsna & Jinsha, which followed the Vidyalaya students’ programme. The items were well-chosen and their voices blended well to deliver accurate and pleasing gamakas. Mangalagunapathi in Naattai, Vandemaataram in a raagamalika, Aathichoodi in Kalyani (with a good alapana), Kaakkaichiraginile in Brindavana Saranga, Pakaivanukku in a raagamalika, and Velan paattu comprised the concert fare.

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